

Jail Ministries of Otsego and Schoharie Counties

HELPING TROUBLED LIVES FIND HOPE AND WHOLENESS IN THE CHRISTIAN WALK

JMOC Newsletter

Winter 2025

Transitions

After nearly 28 years as Executive Director of the Jail Ministry of Otsego County, Rev. Ameen Aswad retired effective December 31, 2024. Rev. Cyd Collischonn has been named as the interim Executive Director and will serve until a new Executive Director is named. Rev. Collischonn has been a licensed minister with the Assemblies of God for 28 years and has been the chaplain at the Schoharie County Jail and has served on the JMOC Board for 5 years. She currently serves as the Director of Counseling at Calvary Assembly of God, in Cobleskill, New York. Rev. Collischonn's Bachelor's Degree is in Addiction and Recovery, she holds a master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and currently is working on her doctorate in Pastoral Counseling from Liberty University.

Contact Us

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A farewell luncheon was held on December 16, 2024, at the Main Street Baptist Church in Oneonta to honor Ameen for his years of service as Executive Director of the Otsego County Jail Ministry (JMOC). The Board members of JMOC and their spouses attended. Rev. Ameen spoke on how God worked in developing the Jail Ministry through those years. The ministry started as a collaborative effort of Cooperstown ministers/priests to a ministry which now has programming in the jail five days a week and an aftercare component that assists the released inmates to adjust to life outside the jail. Clergy people and volunteers from Otsego and Schoharie Counties who have a passion to share the gospel with the inmates provide the programming. Each Board member spoke indicating the strengths of Ameen's leadership. A recurrent theme was his passion and

dedication to having inmates enter a relationship with Christ as well as a concern for the welfare of the inmates when they are released. A plaque was given to Ameen to recognize his meritorious work at JMOC.

Annual Secretary's Report for 2024

Highlights of 2024:

- In Otsego County, service for the inmates have included Sunday Services, One on Ones, and Personal Adjustment Counseling. Two new ministries have started: Discharge Planning and Crossroads Recovery. (See descriptors below)
- Schoharie County has continued with Sunday Service and One on Ones; Bibles, tracts, and Jail Ministry brochures were handed out.
- This year, JMOC participated in the *Mohawk Valley Gives* Fundraiser.
- The Board updated every job description and our Succession Policy.
- We provided pizzas and cookies to the inmates and staff at both the Otsego and Schoharie County jails at Christmas time to encourage everyone and share the love of Jesus.

Annual Treasurers Report for 2024

God truly was faithful to us financially in 2024 where we were able to carry on our ministry to those incarcerated at our two county jails and to assist them with some of their immediate needs upon their release. We were able to end the year in a solid financial position. Praise the Lord! This was also made possible by you, our ministry partners, and your willingness to obey God's prompting in your hearts to pray diligently for our ministry, and at those times to so generously give financially to our work. Thank you for being God's willing vessel through your prayers and giving to help us in our endeavors and passion to meet the spiritual and physical needs of these men and women. We pray God's blessing on each of you. We are looking forward with great anticipation to what God has in store for JMOC in 2025.

Annual Otsego County Jail Reports

Jail Ministry Attendance Report

- Throughout 2024, attendance at the Otsego County Jail for services has been on a steady incline, reaching six to eight persons for some sessions.
- We added the Discharge Planning and Crossroads Recovery programs in the summer.
- Services are now available five days a week which has led to better relationships and open doors with the inmates and staff.
- For the year 2024, we had thirteen volunteers and have logged 308 hours, 45 minutes combined for all services.
- There have been fourteen commitments to Christ throughout the year! Praise God! All praise, honor, and glory go to God.

Discharge Planning on Tuesdays

Back in August of this year, Dawn Schuman and Ameen Aswad began going into the jail to do discharge planning for those inmates who wanted JMOC services to help make their re-entry back into the community a successful one. It has also been a time to meet with the new inmates to introduce our programs and give them a Bible and a *Daily Bread* devotional. During our time on Tuesday's, we have completed several discharge plans and met with many new inmates. We have had the opportunity to share the Gospel and see several inmates decide to invite Christ into their lives. It has also been a time to help these new believers grow in their relationship with Christ. The increase in attendance in all our programs is due to God creating a hunger

in the hearts of the inmates during our time on Tuesdays. Please continue to pray for this ministry and that more of the new inmates will want to meet with us.

Aftercare Report

Last year we were privileged to provide aftercare to 35 individuals recently released from incarceration. Through this initiative we supplied essentials like clothing, food, and cell phones, recognizing that releasees are released with little more than the clothes on their backs. The cell phones proved invaluable, enabling them to report to parole officers, search for employment, and reconnect with their families. Additionally, we had the honor of praying for everyone, offering spiritual encouragement, and opening the door for ongoing support from the faith community.

New Program

CROSSROADS

On Thursdays at the Otsego County Jail, there is a new program that is being offered called *CROSSROADS*. The program is a ten-step guide to help people with addictions and to a relationship with their Savior. The curriculum was written by Ed Welch, which helps people to stop, listen at the crossroads of life, and to distinguish between the voice of folly and the voice of God. The program encourages them to confess their doublemindedness in terms of loving and hating their addictions and to follow the Word of God to freedom in Christ. By the end of the program, each inmate will have gone public with his story (by sharing in the group) and started to formulate a “plan” for their recovery. The attendees are also encouraged to love others and to respond appropriately when things don’t go as planned. Rev. Jack Klosheim, Rev. Ken Zulkosky and Don Rifanburg are the instructors who indicate that they consider it a privilege to assist several groups through the ten-step program and then starting it all over again. There are usually 4 to 8 men who participate each week, many of whom attend faithfully week after week.

New Program in 2023

Group Counselling Program

The Otsego and Schoharie County Jails have had one-on-one counseling for several years. In 2023, the Otsego County jail initiated a group counselling program, generally on Fridays. Sessions will typically last for ninety minutes. Attendance ranges from one to eight people. There are sessions when the inmates must be seen in two separate groups because of some personality differences. There are times when an inmate will request to meet privately. With the correction officer’s approval, these sessions can last up to fifteen minutes.

The inmates who attend are seeking answers, typically not related to a deeper revelation with God but on how they can fix their problems. They are usually at one of the lowest points in life. With great uncertainty about their future, regret over missing loved ones, and the aspect of incarceration for an extended period, they want answers on how they can cope. The answer, of course, is reliance on God. Through revelation from the Holy Spirit, they start to understand the heart of Father God, the love and sacrifice of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The program stresses that when one relies on God for the challenges ahead, they are much more surmountable.

Russell Anderson initiated this program and has provided it every week. Russ is a certified Christian counsellor and an ordained pastor.

Schoharie County Jail Report

2024 was a year of opportunities for the ministry at the Schoharie Jail. For a while, Schoharie had a fair population of inmates, including women. As the year progressed, due to many reasons, the jail population dwindled, and the women were moved to other facilities.

Yet, these roadblocks did not discourage our faithful team. Pastor Robert Collischonn, Grant Despress, Peter Enders, and Destiny Negron, continued to minister, even when there was just one inmate for Sunday afternoon services. Peter also faithfully checked in on Fridays to see if inmates wanted One on One ministry.

Our team, apart from serving in the jail, took time twice this year to fellowship together, praying for the ministry, and getting to know each other as friends and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Cyd Collischonn is excited to announce that Linda Felice has accepted the role of Chaplain for the Schoharie County Jail Ministry. Cyd has been asked to serve as Acting Executive Director until a new director is seated. She thanks God for the five years she has served as Chaplain. Cyd is confident that the ministry is in good hands with Linda.

As Ministry Partners – What You Can Do With and For Us?

- For those interested in going into the jail in either Otsego or Schoharie County, *PREA* (Prison Rape Elimination Act) training is required as well as filling out the Pastoral Reference Forms and appropriate county volunteer applications. If you are interested contact Cyd Collischonn at 518-657-9505 or cyd@cagcobleskill.org.
- PREA training will be offered at the Delhi County jail on March 6, 2025 at 6 PM. Contact John Grenier @ (607) 432-4863 to sign up for PREA training.
- Pastoral Reference Forms and county volunteer applications are available on the jmoconline.org website under the *Resources* tab.
- For those interested in Aftercare, currently in Otsego, the Crossroads Program is taught in the jail as well as offered at *FORDO* (Friends of Recovery) after they are released. The Schoharie County Jail would like to implement the same program but will need people to develop and implement it. If interested, please contact Linda Felice at lcfelice@aol.com.

Parting Thoughts

- 1) **Rejoice** – Philippians 4:4 -Over the countless blessings seen in the lives that have been changed or redirected to following Christ.
- 2) **Pray** – Philippians 4:6 – Hebrews 13:18 – For us that we would hear God clearly, as we continue the path set before us. We need His vision for how we are to continue moving forward to see lives redeemed and changed more and more.
- 3) **Help** – The Board wants to see more volunteers to expand what we are doing in both County Jails.